

Suggestions for Volunteer Notification & Alerting

Emergency Systems for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP) Program

September 6, 2005

The purpose of this document is to share some practical knowledge which has been shared with us by state ESAR-VHP coordinators who have been mobilizing volunteer health professionals over the past several days in response to Hurricane Katrina. We have compiled a suggestions list for “Notification & Alerting” volunteer medical professionals in your state registry. As more information is gathered this list will be updated and additional information will be published.

As a reminder, the ESAR-VHP team is staffed to provide the following support services:

1. Provide a Medical Volunteer Online Registration Template (ESAR-VHP System) which will be under State command and Control (Note: this system has already been established and operational for 8 states).
2. Provide technical assistance with verifying credentials for the volunteer medical and health professionals registered in your system.
3. Provide organizational support and process modeling for coordinating, alerting, and mobilizing volunteers through an ESAR-VHP System use.
4. Provide the use of an electronic notification system to provide call downs and alerts to volunteers registered in our State ESAR-VHP System.
5. Provide telephone call support services for manual notification of smaller groups of targeted volunteers (i.e. if essential, we can have our group make calls for you).

Please remember that if your state requires any technical or organizational assistance please don't hesitate to contact the ESAR-VHP Team at support@esarvhp.com.

Suggestions for Volunteer Notification & Alerting

The following suggestions have been compiled from states who activated volunteers since the start of the Hurricane Katrina response.

“Available Immediately” does not mean “Available Immediately”

- Many volunteers who previously indicated that they would be ready to go “immediately” will in fact require 24-48 hours to deploy. Experience is showing that many medical professionals needed at least 48 hours to make accommodations.

Mark out business processes for the call down and information collection process

- Make sure to have a clear set of business processes for making calls, follow up calls, emailing, and updating and response information. Document the businesses processes and make sure that everyone involved in the activity is following the same set of business rules. This will streamline the process and avoid any miscommunication to volunteers.

Have a script for people making calls, and follow up with more information

- Create a script which answers the questions that all volunteers are likely to have. Suggested information includes:
 - How long is the deployment?
 - Where are the volunteers going?
 - What identification and/or professional licensure documentation do the volunteers need to bring?
 - Where is the staging location?
 - What personal items should a volunteer bring?
 - What medical equipment (if any) should a volunteer bring?
 - Will a volunteer be provided vaccinations?
- Make sure that people know what the key facts are in deploying to this kind of event and if possible, have some type of follow up documentation (web site, e-mail, etc...).
- If you will be using volunteers to staff a call center, make it clear that callers must identify themselves as volunteers helping the state.

Be ready to take down the many questions that will come

- Even with the best script, volunteers will have a number of questions. Document these questions and update your script during the call down if you notice the same question being repeated with multiple callers.
- If questions can't be answered right away, make sure to follow up with e-mail or another phone call. If there are information needs specific to the volunteer, let the volunteer know to expect follow up via emails. This will save a lot of time.

Don't leave messages on answering machines on the first call down

- Leaving messages only creates the problem of managing the callbacks, potentially long after you have completed your deployment roster. Volunteers who do get your message in time will try to call back and potentially disrupt the call down process (especially for groups that have limited phone lines).
- Instead, anticipate a second round of calls for everyone who you were not able to reach the first time. Consider leaving a message this time around with contact instructions (call back number, email address, web site, etc...) as the group will be much smaller and more manageable.

Use of automated and electronic calling services

- Automated alerts and notifications are best utilized when the volunteer is expecting the call. Technology will not replace the need for people to back up phone messages, particularly if there is no prior warning and volunteers do not know *quite know what to expect*.
- The best use of an automated message is to gather initial interest. Have the system contact volunteers and see who is interested in receiving a call with additional information. Again, once people become familiar with the alerting system, you can take advantage of the automation but be cautious when relying on the system as your only method of notification.

Finally, time is scarce

- Do not spend too much time with people who can not deploy immediately but are curious about what is happening.
- For those able to respond, but need to get back to you, consider scheduling a time to re-contact them as opposed to waiting for their call. If they must call you back, consider setting up a dedicated line for call-backs.

Need Further Assistance?

Please remember that if your state requires any technical or organizational assistance you're your volunteer registry or ESAR-VHP System please don't hesitate to contact the ESAR-VHP Team at support@esarvhp.com.